

GUARDIA

A. Bella



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Chapter 1

RAINBOW IN THE DARK

The smell of moisture mixed with blood was spreading through the cold air, as shadows stopped moving and the cave shifted as the light from torches was dancing with the wind. The screams and shouts were silenced, with only a quiet weeping coming from the darkest corner. The mercenary cleansed his twisted dagger that held engraved symbols on its blade. For some, he was known as “Blade” named after the twisted dagger as it formerly belonged to the goblin chieftain. Mask was covering his face, hiding his emotionless gaze.

He was dressed in dark gray armor and a bloody cloak with a hood. As Blade dug through the pockets of the deceased goblins he was initially sent to kill. He didn't view their corpses as beings that used to be alive, beings that had consciousness, ones that had will, goals, or dreams. For him, they were piles of flesh and loot, even before their demise, he had seen them as mere weapon-wielding pests that stood between him and his reward. Life didn't hold a high price in this world unless there was a bounty set on your head. As Blade was looking for anything he could sell when he returned to New Eastbourne, just then he realized he still wasn't alone. At first, he thought one of the goblins was still alive. He went back and checked every single corpse for any signs of life and made sure they were all dead.

Yet when he focused, he could hear something gently weeping in the dark. “What the hell?” he mumbled. He walked over and grabbed a nearby torch and started his descent into the darkness. His dagger was still in his hand as he navigated through the narrow corridors of the cave. Steps from his heavy boots echoed and bounced off the stone walls. Suddenly a bunch of bats flew beside his head, making him almost fall over. He might have not felt empathy or guilt but fear was still very present in him. Eventually, he made his way across the cave, arriving in a room that lacked any other paths except the one he came from. The torch brought light to the room, revealing a rather small wooden cage with iron bars.

The cage wasn't taller than to his stomach, inside was the source of the weeping, It appeared to always move to the opposite corner of the cage from where Blade was standing. When he made sure there wasn't anything else in the room except burned-out torches and the ominous cage in the center, he squatted beside it and brought the torch closer. Two red eyes stared at him from the cage with a distressed expression. Even though he wasn't sure at first, he felt the realization hit like a morning star to the chest. In the cage was a little goblin girl. In the cold with just a torn, ragged piece of cloth thrown over her, she was shivering from the terrible cold of the cavern.

He was very disturbed because of the fact that the goblins held this little goblin girl as a prisoner in their cave. In this world, goblins are separated by gender due to the males being senseless savages, while the females are forced to live in the shadows. For humans, giants, and even their own kind, female goblins are seen as commodities, only to be used for pleasure. Only elves, dwarves, gnomes, and beastmen tolerate and believe that female goblins should have the right to live free like all the other races.

Female goblins usually steal equipment from humans, learn magic, and build hideouts throughout all the continents. But in these lands, they are hunted if not already enslaved. They can only appear in public if they are actively working for their master.

But now that you know what unfortunate fates meet these beings, you can understand the shock Blade felt the moment he discovered her. He thought the best thing to do was to end the girl's suffering. Bringing her with him seemed stupid at best, she would probably be kidnapped and sold into slavery. All these thoughts were running through his head as he stared at the girl. This overwhelming feeling took over Blade, he felt sorry for the poor thing, he smashed the top of the cage with his gauntlet as wood splinters flew into the air. The girl curled up in a ball, thinking her end was coming. The girl checked for the last time, expecting her demise. Despite her expectations, Blade reached out his hand towards her, offering a helping hand. She was very hesitant at first, but Blade had a pleasant expression with good intentions. But failed to realize his mask was covering his face and so covering his compassionate expression. Eventually, the girl slowly reached out her own skinny, small, pale hand. As she holds Blade's hand, she slowly steps out of the destroyed cage, She steps in place for a little, adjusting to the cold floor. On her arm, she bared a strange mark. He decides to talk to the girl. "Hey, what's your name?" he asked in a ghostly voice. He tried to make her feel a bit safer and make himself look less threatening. After a moment she quietly whispers "Lulla".

He took off his cloak and gave it to Lulla, to keep her warm along the way, and even offered to carry her but she gestured that she'll be fine. She kept holding his hand as they started to make their way back through the caverns. They quietly walked through claustrophobic corners. He still hasn't made up his mind by this point.

He wasn't sure what was he going to do with Lulla after they got out. There was this feeling of dread inside his stomach, as he tried to come up with something. His shiny armor reflected the torch's light with the familiar heavy steps echoing around them. On the other hand, Lulla's steps were as quiet as they got, considering she was barefoot. After a long walk they came to the main hall, the one with all of the goblins slayed. Lulla was too little to realize that Blade had slaughtered the goblins as a part of his bounty hunt; she thought he had come to her rescue. From that moment, any doubts she had about Blade vanished. She teared up and became overwhelmed with joy but didn't give it away and Blade didn't notice.

They slowly approached the cave's exit. Blade climbed onto one of the rocks leading down to the cave. After that, he crouched and helped Lulla climb on the rock. They repeated this until they reached the surface. On the way up, Lulla slipped and almost fell all the way down, but he caught her by the arm, slightly bruising it with his gauntlet. "Don't worry, I got you" Blade grunted. When they got out, they appeared in a dark forest. It was a stormy night. Rain was pouring, lightning strikes were cracking the ground, and thunder was rumbling, reverberating throughout the lands. By one of the trees, stood a black horse with light armor plates, covering his head, neck, shoulders, and thighs. Two leather bags were hanging from both of the horses' sides. Before they ventured into the darkness of the forest, Blade took the cloak off Lulla, he laid it on the stone ground. He pulled his dagger out of his scabbard and started cutting the cloak, After a few minutes he finished cutting it. Then he rewrapped Lulla, now in a much more fitting cloak. "There you go, do you like it?" failing to find better words. Lulla shook her head, signaling she liked it. It perfectly covered her, except her face, legs, and arms, which would come to haunt them soon enough. He picked up Lulla and sat her on the horse, he followed. They ventured into the dark.

Their destination was far away. Lulla was holding onto Blade the whole way. They were accompanied by various sounds coming from bushes, trees, and holes in the ground. From time to time a pair of glowing eyes observed them, sometimes there were hordes of them, Fortunately, none of them were large enough to be something that could threaten them. The rain eventually stopped and the thunder fell silent. Blade and Lulla started to chat a bit. "So, how did you get to that cave?" he asked. Lulla remained silent. "Can you tell me something about yourself? Where are you from?" Lulla asked instead. He was silent for a moment, and then he began to open up about his past.

Blade used to live with his parents (his human father and an elf mother) in a village in the northern part of Valeria, in the Valeria Serrafel territory. Valeria is the largest continent (and also the place where this story takes place), to the north is Frostholm, or the northern peninsula, and Shadowmire, a large island in the east, and Sandora in the southwest, together these lands made Nihiltania. At this time Valeria was in chaos. Humans were in a vicious war with giants, and Blade's village was caught in the giant's raids. When the raid began, he was injured and his face was scarred, Although his facial structure remained unscathed but the skin on his face was scarred and ruined, and his father quickly wrapped his head in cloth, only leaving an opening for him to see.

After his father bandaged him up, he sat him on a horse, similarly to what Blade did with Lulla, and said "Go to the Elven Kingdom of High Trees, the princess was friends with your mother, they'll take care of you". "But father, what about you? Why won't you come with me?" Blade whimpered. "I'll try to help your mother but your safety is our top priority" his father roared. Blade cried all the way to the elven kingdom and that was the last time he did. The elves took care of him and taught him magic and how to use weapons. There was one spell that Blade took a liking to, and the spell was Shadowwalk. Thanks to this spell, its summoner is able to become completely undetectable. The spell cannot be casted in very bright light. There were a bunch of more spells Blade learned that we will talk about when the time comes. When Blade grew up, he fought in elves' wars and later he left the kingdom. The king told him that if he ever comes back they'll greet him with open arms. And so he went on to work as a mercenary with bounty hunting when he currently wasn't hired by someone to fight, steal, kill, and anything and everything of that sort. One day he took a bounty hunt that required him to clear out a cave infested with goblins and that's where our story began...

The sun began to come out as they entered the plains. Just outside of the forest stood a small village with a little general shop. "Oh look, they have a store here, let's stop to buy some food and some clothes for you." Blade said. And Lulla agreed. They made their way to the village. They walked into the village, tied the horse to the post in front of the shop, and entered. Blade looked and rummaged through the goods for a while. Ultimately he picked up some children's clothes, boots, and two smaller pieces of bread. As he was counting his gold before handing it to the shopkeeper, he told Blade that he had some "fresh" products straight from Frostholm, the "products" the shopkeeper was referring to were called "snus".

He knew what snus was, he had his fair share of it during his war campaigns in the north, side by side with the ice elves of Frostholm (the forest elves were helping to fight in the north against the giants). "I'll get two cans please" Blade decided, since he hadn't felt the tobacco taste in years. The shopkeeper hadn't even noticed Lulla, female goblins only grow to about 1.4 meters in height and since Lulla was a child, she was only about eighty centimeters tall so he didn't see her walking by the shelves and tables. Blade was really tired at this point and kind of forgot that this place was not very safe for Lulla. They exited the shop, mounted their horse, and continued on their road. On the way there, they stopped one more time so Lulla could get into her new clothes and boots. She kept Blade's cloak so she wouldn't attract unwanted attention. "Wow, you look good little miss." Blade complimented Lulla's new look. She blushed. By sunset they approached the great walls of New Eastbourne, the largest city on the east side of Valeria, right by the Middle Sea, They entered the city and even though they got weird looks from the gate guards, they continued their way deeper into the streets.

They stopped by a pub that was offering bounty hunts and walked in, Lulla following in his footsteps. As soon as they stepped inside, people sitting at the tables spun around in their direction. One of the large soldiers noticed Lulla's mark. He was melting them with his stare. Blade, still oblivious and the only thing remaining on his mind was getting his reward, getting a room in an inn, and sleeping. With Lulla behind him, he walked up to the bartender (the captain bounty hunter was on a bounty hunt that day so the bartender was taking care of the contracts) and asked him for a reward, after confirming he indeed accomplished his mission. Before he left he picked up one more contract with the title "Lost Bounty Hunter in a Dungeon". When Blade and Lulla walked out, the bounty hunters sitting inside started mumbling gossip and arguing about what even was that thing. By tomorrow they figured out the little thing wasn't any gnome, it was a goblin, a small lean, goblin girl.

Blade walked out and right into the inn. With Lulla following him with short, fast steps, they laid down in the beds. The night was long with a nocturnal city buzz in the background. Blade woke up early in the morning. He grabbed one of the two bags he took from his horse, and picked out the snus can. Grabbed one of the pouches, slid his mask a bit revealing his mouth, and put the pouch under his upper lip. He promptly jumped up and ran to the toilet. After he came back, he read through the contract. He was supposed to go to a nearby dungeon, just outside the city, and find a bounty hunter who got lost in the dungeon's depths. After a bit of thinking he decided to go through with it, there still wasn't any need for his mercenary work. He woke up Lulla, got on the horse, and went to the dungeon. The noon came when they approached the dungeon. Just then Blade realized that Lulla was with him in the pub the day before. Even though he was concerned he brushed it off. And so they entered the dungeon, unbeknownst to them they went right into the fire.

Chapter 2

INTO THE FIRE

The smell of rotten corpses was present as soon as they entered the dungeon. The dungeon's hallways were spreading from the room by the entrance where Blade and Lulla were standing. There weren't any lit torches and there was a sense of impending danger coming from the darkness. Rats were the only sound source besides faint groaning, most probably coming from a floor below. Blade was expecting the lack of torches so he brought an unused torch with him. He pulled it out and with his other hand he casted the second spell he knew "Sphere of Flames". It is exactly what it sounds like. A small ball of fire started growing out of his hand until it was covering his whole palm. Blade pressed his hand to the top of the torch and set it on fire.

You would be expecting the torch to light up the whole room, but it didn't. Instead, the light rays weren't reaching very far and only made it possible for them to see a short distance. Blade was and wasn't surprised at the same time, it basically meant that they were not supposed to expect anything pleasant as the darkness was consuming the light. They started walking room by room, hallway by hallway. One of the hallways had its metal chandeliers dropped on the floor, obstructing most of the way further. But with Blade's help, they managed to get through and continue their search for the man. They've entered one of the dark rooms.

It was an office of some sort, there were a bunch of papers on the wooden table, and they were all over the place. On the papers were records of people held within the dungeon, with their names, races, and other information. Blade didn't recognize any of the names, "There's nothing here, let's move on" Blade whispered. They began to search the dungeon room by room, but they hadn't found anything. When they finished looking through the rooms they headed towards a staircase at the end of the hallway.

Lulla stayed close behind Blade, she was a bit upset because she couldn't hold his hand. Even if Blade wasn't holding the torch and his twisted dagger, he probably wouldn't be holding her hand because of how stressed and yet focused he was. But when they entered one of the many identical rooms, there was a scratching sound coming from behind a flipped table. Blade's grip strengthened and he focused on the point from where the sound was coming from.

Blade started to walk towards it. Then the sound suddenly stopped. Blade stopped as well. Then out of nowhere, a goblin jumped from behind the table, he was wielding a small mace. As he was jumping he swung the mace from behind his head. Blade, fortunately, blocked the strike with his metal gauntlet. The blow nearly shattered the piece of armor. He wasn't planning on giving the goblin another chance to attack. He swung and bashed the goblin's right side of the face with the torch, burning his dark blue skin. The goblin screeched and his voice was piercing through the dungeon's walls, there was no way other beings occupying the depths didn't hear them. The goblin, in a desperate attempt to stop Blade from burning him anymore, jumped back, poking his melted facial skin, he twitched from the pain but once again he raised his arms and came for yet another swing, this time aiming for Blade's leg. But before he managed to even reach his knee or whatever he was aiming for. Blade pierced his head with his dagger, and the blood started spraying everywhere while he knocked his helmet off. The mace flew out of his hands when his brain was pierced. The goblin dropped dead on the floor, Some of his blood was even sprayed on Blade's torch but it didn't go out due to the fire being a magic spell. "Fucking hell, that scared me..." Blade told himself.

Blade wiped the blood off of the dagger's blade. Lulla ran to check on Blade and seemed she was thankful for Blade protecting her. She knew that Blade was a strong warrior. Blade wiped the sweat off his forehead. He took a moment to put himself together, and after that, they resumed their search. One thought was currently overtaking Blade's mind, What was this one goblin doing here? Could he have wandered too far from his group? or... were they here with him? Anyway... they were not able to find their man on this floor either. And so they moved toward the next staircase. The real horror was just about to start. Before they descended, Blade and Lulla sat down for a small break.

Lulla was carrying Blade's bag, she placed it on the floor while Blade set up a campfire. Blade snapped and slashed some of the furniture to get some dry wood. The moisture didn't take a toll on most of it, further deep, the wood wouldn't catch on fire even with Blade's Sphere of Flames.

As they were sitting, Lulla asked Blade why was he even defending her? Blade thought about it for a second and he answered that protecting her gave him a reason to live. Before he started caring for Lulla, he was just wandering the lands of Nihiltania, without a reason, without a goal. When he was in the elven army, he felt unfulfilled, When he became a mercenary he felt a little better but it became repetitive after a few years and after most of the giants moved north towards Frostholm, mercenary work was much less sought after. Blade didn't have a reputation for people to seek him for his work like other famous mercs. He was doing more bounty hunts than mercenary work for over a year (he was more of a bounty hunter at this point). Gold was scarce. When he thought about how he was gonna do this for the rest of his life, killing anyone and everyone for a few golden coins... Only suicide came into consideration... He had nothing to live for. But protecting Lulla was something he could commit his life to. A reason to live for...

Lulla was amazed, to say the least. She had one more question though. Blade had spiky black hair but in the dark it had a faint blue glow as well as his eyes making them more excel on his plain mask. Blade explained that this was due to him being half-elf and half-human. Elves have a large amount of mana stored within them, with him being only half-elf, the mana was literally overflowing. They sat for a little longer and after that, they came down yet another floor. On the third floor, Blade realized that coming here might have been a mistake. This floor (and everyone after this) contained cells where the prisoners were held as well as torture chambers. There were human remains and skeletons scattered everywhere throughout these lower floors. The thing that made Blade question the decision to come here was a headless corpse, There was a knife with a V-shaped blade that was used for pouring a drug into the open wound made by the knife. The drug has different names based on regions and continents. In the streets of Valerian towns the drug is called "Beastbane". Officials and guards use the official name in the land of Valeria "Chimera's Veil".

Chimera's Veil or Beastbane is a drug that comes from Shadowmire where it is produced from a plant called "Chimera's thorn". It is imported to Valeria but rarely reaches Frosthalm where it holds a high price. Beastbane causes a euphoria of incomprehensible power but this isn't even the reason this drug is so infamous. Symptoms of Beastbane usage are bloodlust, memory loss, loss of muscle control, skin rot, immediate addiction, and most importantly melting of flesh- withdrawal usually ends up in suicide. You see, when there was an addict, you only needed one to overdose which would cause his flesh to melt, which made him absorb other living beings, thereby creating chimeras. Chimeras are living organisms consisting of flesh, hair, fur, nails, teeth, bones, organs, and everything you can find in a human, elf, gnome, or any other race or animal.

There once was a notorious chimera that resembled a huge wolf in shape and is said to have become a primordial deity (lowest tier of godlike beings) and it was roaming Valeria since Beastbane first came to Valeria. Wherever it may roam, you can always hear a large, heavy, rusty chain that he has tied around his neck being dragged across the ground. He was named Mortalis The Devourer.

Blade was examining the knife and as he expected, the knife's blade contained traces of Beastbane. The corpse was headless so it couldn't transform into a chimera but Blade was afraid there would be more of them. When he stood up, Lulla was gone. Frantically he started running through the dungeon, looking into every corner but he found nothing at last. Then out of nowhere, he heard Lulla screaming from the floor below. He bolted down the stairs and he discovered a huge block of prison cells leading down at least another three floors. Blade heard a bunch of creatures running further away from the staircase and into the prison complex. Blade put out the torch and raised his hand, he casted Shadowwalk and disappeared into the darkness. Lulla was kidnapped by a horde of goblins who were traversing the dungeon. As one of them was carrying her, he held his hand across her mouth, muffling her voice. Lulla managed to bite the goblin's finger and scream to alert Blade and make him able to track her. The goblins carried her to one of the many torture chambers, and there they tied her up, While few of them had gone outside the cell to guard, three of them stayed inside and shut the door. Time slowed down at the moment. The goblins began to undress, planning to make their way with little Lulla.

Those monsters began to approach Lulla with grins on their faces. As they stood before them, something emerged from the corner of the dimly lit room. It was a tall figure with glowing eyes, the goblins hadn't noticed. Abruptly the figure closed in on the goblin that was furthest from Lulla. When the figure stepped out of the dark corner, it was Blade. He crouched and came closer to the goblin. Quickly he wrapped his arm around the goblin's neck, The goblin grabbed his arms with his own and tried to alert the others. But Blade's grip closed his airways and then, without warning Blade reached his other arm around him, with his dagger in his hand, and started mutilating his genitals. The goblin started to shake and jump around violently, Blade finished the mutilation after just a few seconds, and then he let the goblin loose. Screams filled the room, and the mutilated goblin immediately fell to the ground. The other two naked goblins spun around to see Blade towering over them with rage emanating from his eyes. The goblins dashed towards the heavy door, trying to open it as quickly as possible, and ran away. Blade had different plans.

The goblins were trying to pull the door open enough for them to squeeze through. Blade raised his arm and summoned a Sphere of Flames, One of the goblins turned to him, trying to buy time while the other one opened the door. Blade tensed, then swung his arm forward, sending the fiery sphere right into the goblin's groin. Sphere of Flames can stick to most objects and beings and so it did to the goblin's testicles. The air shattered with the most spine-chilling, unearthly shriek. The blood froze in the veins of the goblin guards standing outside the door. Lulla just gazed at the sheer brutality that was playing out in front of her. The goblin with the burning crotch lay on the ground with tears pouring out. He was trying to put out the fire with no avail, only causing more damage to his genitalia. Meanwhile, the other goblin managed to open the door and told his allies to run away. Blade dashed to the door and kept running after them, Lulla stayed in the same spot as she heard the dying screams outside the chamber. She was glad that Blade came for her, she didn't even mind the brutally violent approach since what were they planning to do to her. Blade returned after a few minutes, with a lit torch and a new armor piece on his arm that he scavenged from the dead goblins." Come on, get up, let's finish this already" Blade told Lulla. She obeyed.

They began to search the prison complex. They sure did find hordes of corpses and skeletons but not the man himself. As they were traversing one of the walkways, something seemed to have materialized in front of them. Blade told Lulla to stay behind him. When they came closer, the thing started to crawl toward them. It was a chimera. This one was a pile of flesh with tentacles growing out of it. It looked like this chimera didn't consume many beings in its lifetime, meaning it wasn't very strong. Blade took out most of its tentacles with a few strikes, finishing it by splitting it in half. On their way to the bottom, they've only encountered one other chimera, also a very weak one. After hours of making their way through the dungeon, they reached the bottom at once.

The bottom layer was vast, it seemed there was no end to it. Every time you thought you'd searched the whole place, there would be yet another expansive hall. But there was one room, a spacious torture chamber. It was mostly empty with pillars and iron bars splitting the room into sectors and some rubble and human remains. In the middle of it lay a corpse, missing both legs, one arm, and half of his head. Blade inspected the corpse and confirmed that this was their guy. Blade found a necklace he would use as a confirmation to get the reward for the bounty. As Blade was looking for anything useful he could get from the man's corpse, Lulla followed him. But then...

A loud chain rumbling sound began to approach them...

The creeping death was coming...

Chapter 3

CREEPING DEATH

The smell of death flooded the space. Blade froze in place. He heard the stories but he always thought that's all they were, just stories. Chimera becoming a primordial deity sounded crazy. Blade couldn't maintain his composure, he grabbed Lulla and ran behind one of the pillars. Sweat was running down his face behind his mask, he was struggling to breathe. Slowly Blade looked at Lulla. She was scared but had no idea who was about to enter the room. After Blade took a look at Lulla, he realized he had to get her out of this place. A terrifying presence has entered the room. Blade peeked from behind the pillar and saw it. Huge wolf with different colored patches of fur, hundreds of teeth of different sizes and shapes, and eyes appearing and disappearing all throughout his body. It was him Mortalis The Devourer. A sense of fear and impending doom was emanating from him. He was looking around the dark chamber. Blade already knew that he could sense them there. Blade knew that there was no escape, so he told Lulla to stay hidden and sneak out if Mortalis got too distracted with him. Lulla quietly pleaded for Blade to not face the beast, but he saw no other way for them to escape. And so he emerged in front of the primordial deity, ready to face the almost inevitable demise that awaited him.

Mortalis, as soon as he saw him, started barking and growling at him. Blade raised his twisted dagger and took a battle stance, bracing himself for combat. Mortalis was staring at him with death in his many eyes. Unexpectedly Mortalis didn't instantly begin to fight with Blade. Mortalis instead slowly walked into the shadows, behind one of the pillars but did not emerge from the other side. Lulla was still in the same spot as before, looking out for an opportunity to run away. Cold air filled the chamber, death wasn't in the air anymore, instead, there was a stench of the chimera present.

Blade almost lost focus by this time. Suddenly the beast emerged from behind him, out of nowhere with his mouth open, ready to bite Blade's head off. Incredibly Blade managed to dodge the attack by dashing to the side. The battle officially began. Mortalis landed and spun around with his claws grinding across the stone floor. He didn't hesitate and casted Shadowwalk. While someone is using Shadowwalk they don't produce any odor or noise and make them mostly translucent, in the shadow, they are basically undetectable. Mortalis looked around, but he failed to find Blade. But Blade gave Mortalis a taste of his own medicine. Blade, while in Shadowwalk, used yet another spell he knew, it being "Charged Blink".

Charged Blink is a weaker variant of the spell known as "Blink" or "Swift Blink". Blink makes the caster teleport a short distance leaving a trail of mana from the first point to the second for a brief moment. Charged Blink is weaker due to it having to be charged in the moments leading up to the teleportation. There aren't many beings that can cast Swift Blink.

Trail of mana lead from behind one of the pillars, up above Mortalis. Mortalis saw Blade as soon as he blinked on top of him with eyes on his back but Blade was fast. Blade of the twisted dagger pierced Mortalis's side, Blade held onto the dagger as Mortalis was jumping around, trying to throw him down from his back. Blade jumped down on the opposite side while still gripping the dagger. This caused him to create a large, gaping wound. Chimeras usually have multiple hearts depending on who or what they consume, In Mortalis's case, Blade would have to destroy enough hearts so the beast's blood can't circulate fast enough. There are also brains but chimeras usually only absorb the contents of the brains they consume and so they really have just one, destroying it kills the chimera. There was no time to rest, as soon as Blade landed, a claw strike was headed his way. This time instead of dodging, he braced himself for the impact. When Mortalis's claw made contact with Blade, the beast pushed Blade but managed to not fall, instead, he stuck to Mortalis's paw somehow. Mortalis was confused but quickly he realized the reason. The twisted dagger has gone right through his paw. Blade pulled, splitting the beast's paw in half.

Now... Mortalis became really... FUCKING... PISSED. His godpowers had awakened. Tentacles grew out of his back and shoulders. He unleashed a barrage of attacks. Blade rapidly undid his breastplate. Thanks to this, he could be more agile at the cost of losing protection. First came the tentacles. Because Blade's dagger is light, he could slash the tentacles before they managed to hit. He stood there, waiting for his next attack. Mortalis began to charge at Blade while snapping his jaw with tremendous pressure. There wasn't any opening for a counterstrike. While dodging Mortalis's high-speed charges, Blade managed to cast Shadowwalk, granting him an advantage.

Meanwhile, Lulla sneaked to the next pillar but she still had three more to go if she wanted to escape the room. Mortalis was waiting for Blade's next attack. And he didn't need to wait for long. Blade went to one of the flesh piles and set it on fire. Mortalis raised his head as he sniffed. Right then, Blade reappeared right under his head, he thrust his dagger, piercing his jaw and then the skull.

He pulled the dagger back. Rolling away from him, Blade expected the beast to fall but he didn't. His brain wasn't located within his skull, thus the beast was still on the hunt. Blade began to get tired from all that jumping and dodging and rolling. He was thinking about how he could defeat him. Before Mortalis struck again, Blade thought of a way he could take out most of his hearts, killing him. He was so confident about his plan, that it gave him a burst of energy. But before he could execute his plan, Mortalis stepped into the shadows once again. Blade focused. Waiting from which side Mortalis would strike, he was spinning around to reduce the chance of getting ambushed.

But Mortalis managed to get a good chance. He jumped at Blade from a dead angle, knocking him to the ground. And there he was. Standing above Blade, eating away at his soul with his demonic eyes. Just then he noticed something moving in the shadows. It was Lulla, she froze when he looked her way. She tried to move to another pillar while Mortalis was jumping, so he wouldn't notice her. But she wasn't expecting Blade to get knocked down. Yet Mortalis thought he wouldn't waste his time hunting down such a little foolish creature. But when he looked down...

Blade was gone. Mortalis started to frantically look around. When Blade once again blinked on top of him. This time he landed on his neck, wrapped his legs around it, and thrust his dagger into the back of his neck. With his legs wrapped around, he swung himself, slicing his neck all the way around. When he got back up, he grabbed the fur on his back and landed a powerful kick, snapping his neck.

Mortalis's head hit the floor. Life vanished from his eyes. Blade jumped down, determined to finish off the beast. Now Mortalis has lost his sight, smell, and hearing, he only could use his touch to find Blade. Mortalis began to extend his tentacles. They started to fill the room, and he kept them slightly above ground in constant movement. They were about to reach Lulla when Blade dashed by her, grabbed her, and jumped and hung himself onto the rusty bars above. Blade helps Lulla climb onto the bars so she can stay there while Blade finishes off Mortalis. When Lulla climbed onto the bars and could support herself, Blade casted a Sphere of Flames and divided it into smaller balls of fire. Then he threw them around Mortalis, making him retract his tentacles. When the floor was clear, he jumped down and started sprinting toward the beast. He dashed by with the dagger slashing Mortalis's side. This blow took out two of his hearts. Mortalis tried to resist, but now he was so injured, that he could barely move. He sent another cluster of tentacles toward Blade. But Blade dashed once again slashing through tentacles and Mortalis's other side, taking out an additional heart. Mortalis was now barely standing. Blade dashed one last time and dived into the huge bleeding wound, completely disappearing in it. Mortalis began to violently shake and twist. From time to time a blade emerged from different parts of Mortalis's body. Blade slashed and thrust and cut and stabbed the innards of Mortalis. After a while, Blade emerged from the other side, covered in blood and guts. He stepped out of the beast's corpse and approached Lulla, who was still hanging on the bars. He helped her get down and they made their way to the exit.

By the time they got out, it was nighttime. They got on the horse and began their way back to New Eastbourne to pick up their reward. On their way back, they stopped by a lake where Blade washed himself while Lulla started a campfire so they could rest a bit.

In the morning they continued on their road. They arrived at the city gates just before noon. Lulla had her cloak on. They walked to the pub where their reward was waiting for them. Blade got down, helped Lulla, and tethered the horse to the post outside the pub. They've entered the pub. As soon as they stepped over the door's threshold, all eyes landed on them. They both noticed and got nervous. They slowly began to walk down the aisles of tables until they reached the bounty hunt booth. But when they got close, Blade noticed their portraits on the bounty hunt board. Two big sketches, dead or alive with hefty rewards. Blade froze once again as he looked at his effigy on the bounty hunt board.

When he looked back, one of the bounty hunters was standing right by Lulla, holding a knife by her neck. Blade was struck with a fit of rage. In a moment of pure fury, he pulled out his twisted dagger, raised it above his head, and sliced the bounty hunter's hand, clean off...

At this moment, they realized... They have to be quick or they'll be dead

Chapter 4

BE QUICK OR BE DEAD

The smell of liquor, vomit, and blood was present as the commotion began inside the pub. Bounty hunters started to close in on Blade and Lulla. Blade kneeled down, wrapped his arms around Lulla, and began to cast the Charged Blink. When they were completely cornered one of the bounty hunters intended to stab Blade but as he thrust the knife. Blade and Lulla disappeared. They took the chance while the bounty hunters wondered where they went and ran to the exit. He nearly broke the door when he charged at them. He threw Lulla on the horse and they ran beyond the city walls. Meanwhile, the bounty hunters created a party to hunt them down with Draven Silverwing in the lead.

Draven Silverwing was a feared man. He was towering at over two and a half meters in height. He wore heavy spiked armor and wielded a huge metal mace. He rode on an enormous muscular horse who wore armor, similar to his own. If this guy gets his hands on Blade, who knows what will happen.

As Blade and Lulla rode their horse through the Valerian plains, Blade was shaking. He was asking himself what he was going to do now. They were not safe here or anywhere else in a hundred kilometers of range. For the first time, Blade didn't know what he was going to do. They slowed down a bit. Lulla told Blade that it was her fault he was in trouble now but he repelled that opinion and told her that he would make sure she was safe. Lulla hugged Blade from behind as they jogged on the dirt road. The only place where Lulla could be truly safe was The Elven Kingdom of High Trees. But Blade couldn't stop thinking about something. When he was gutting Mortalis, it was almost like he heard a man's deep voice say "HA! A mortal killed a primordial deity? What a shame." At the time he didn't know it but this was The Guardian speaking to him. All of a sudden a distant war cry could be heard, escorted by the sound of thundering hooves. Blade and Lulla turned their heads to see a group of armored horses with bounty hunters riding them a few hundred meters behind them. They were approaching them, fast. Blade immediately released rein pressure and signaled the horse to full gallop. Armor on the horse started making a clashing sound and the horses' hooves dug dirt out of the road.

They've approached the Southern Ravine Forest. In their way to the Elven Kingdom stood the Great Ravine. An enormous ravine that was created thousands of years ago during a battle between the Titans. Aquaria, The Tidecaller, and Terramor, The Earthshaker. During the battle, Aquaria casted a vast tidal wave that held such a force, that it sent Terramor flying right into the Valerian sea cliffs, creating the famous great ravine. Across the Great Ravine lead a few rope bridges, spread every few kilometers. But they were still far, far away and the bounty hunters were on their tail. When they approached the forest, they felt a bit more relaxed because it was harder to track them there. The forest was dark and dense, it was easy to get lost here. Blade had a vague idea of what he was doing and when they'd entered the forest, the bounty hunters lost their sight of them, if they'd even seen them in the first place.

They wandered through the forest with an occasional breeze sweeping by, ruffling Blade's hair. There were lots of magical, glowing flowers and plants. Both had no idea what any of them were used for or any effects they could have on them. At one point, the horse rubbed his leg against one of the flowers, leaving an orange trail of pollen on his leg. Hours passed and they decided to stop for the night as this was probably the safest place on their way. They sat down but they decided to not make a campfire to attract unwanted attention. Lulla roamed around a bit, collecting some berries because there wasn't much left of the bread from earlier. Meanwhile, Blade noticed the orange glowing pollen trail on the horse's leg and rubbed it off with his gauntlet and didn't think much of it. Lulla came back with some berries and they began to eat, When he was cutting the bread something happened. Nobody is really sure what happened next.

Suddenly a spear landed by Blade's head and got stuck in a tree. Blade looked towards the way it came from. He spotted a goblin, who was already ready to throw another. He yelled at Lulla to hide in the bush while he took care of him. While Lulla ran to the bush, Blade charged toward the goblin.

The goblin began to run but Blade was closing in on him. Just as he was about to get him, Blade stepped on a rope trap the goblins prepared. Before he knew it, a noose tightened around his ankle, swinging him up in the air, and leaving him suspended in the air. A bunch of goblins began to surround him from all sides as he watched them approach him. They thought they got him but their souls left their bodies when Blade grabbed his dagger, cut the rope, and landed on the ground. He started dashing around, slashing and mutilating the goblins. Just as he crushed the last one's skull with his boot, the chieftain arrived with yet more of them. Four of them began to flee with the chieftain while the other two stayed behind to slow down Blade, pointing their spears toward him as he stood in front of them, menacingly.

Blade started to approach them. One of the goblins decided that it was not worth it. He ran into the darkness of the forest. The other one held his ground, urine began to run down his leg with tears beginning to squeeze out of the corners of his eyes. Blade reached the range of the spear but the goblin didn't attack. Blade grabbed him by the neck, lifted him off the ground, and unleashed a hailstorm of insults that could not be retold due to their sheer complexity and harshness. When Blade was finished, the goblin appeared to be dead but he was still very much alive. Blade handed over his twisted dagger to the goblin. The goblin grabbed it with both of his hands and cut his stomach open from side to side, his guts spilled out on the ground and soiled Blade's boots. Blade took his dagger, wiped off the blood, and sheathed it. Then he noticed something in the corner of his eye. He saw the bunch of goblins hiding behind a bush, peeking at him. They saw the whole ordeal and ran off after Blade looked their way. Blade made his way back, knowing that the goblins wouldn't come back. When Blade came back to where he told Lulla to hide, she was nowhere to be found. He began to panic. As he was strolling around in distress, a nearby bush began to shake. Blade pulled out his dagger, thinking the goblins still didn't have enough. Instead of the goblin horde, Lulla emerges from the bush... holding the twisted dagger.

Blade was stunned. He tilted his head and looked at his hand with his dagger nowhere to be found. Lulla stood for a moment before asking Blade if he was okay. Blade walked over to her kneeled down and asked what happened and where she was. Lulla began to retell what happened. When Lulla came back with some berries, they began to eat. Blade was cutting the bread when something happened.

All of a sudden Blade's dagger fell onto the grass. Lulla noticed and looked at Blade but in his place only stood a blue-grayish toad with white eyes. Lulla rolled over to him, she was unable to wrap her head around what she was seeing. Lulla redirected her gaze toward a bush that was in front of them. A little gnome wizard was peeking at her from in between the leaves. He was casting a spell with his staff, and Lulla thought he was going to change her to a frog as well. She grabbed Blade the toad and threw him into the leather bag so he wouldn't get lost. Then she picked up the twisted dagger and got down to all fours, the mark on her arm began to glow in a faint blood-red color. Lulla began to pursue the gnome wizard (he began to run away when she started to rapidly approach him).

She resembled a fox on a hunt as she ran after the little man. At last, she was on the verge of catching him. With a determined leap, she propelled forward. But the gnome wizard smacked the ground with his staff, summoning a twig wall that rose up from the ground in the place he pounded. Lulla, with an exuberant yet slightly misjudged maneuver, careened forward with all the grace of an enthusiastic bullfrog, only to find her face making a comedic, albeit painfully awkward, acquaintance with the wall of twigs. The impact sent a jolt through her senses as if the wall had momentarily decided to partake in a lively jig of its own, leaving her with a tingling nose, a befuddled expression, and a newfound appreciation for the structural integrity of twigs. She fell to the ground, and her body refused to continue the chase or to do anything else at all.

After a short session of unconsciousness, she woke up and found herself tied to the ground by tree roots. The gnome wizard was sitting close by on a small rock, smoking tobacco with his pipe. Lulla tried to get out of the root prison but it was to no avail, She looked towards the gnome and yelled at him to let her go. The gnome placed his pipe down on the rock, walked over to Lulla, and began to yell at her, asking her if she came to these woods to hunt gnomes or collect flowers for the production of opioids. He was so harsh indeed, that Lulla began to tear up and was about to cry. This wasn't the wizard's plan, he quickly tried to calm Lulla down. She told him the reason why they were in the forest. When the gnome heard about their hardships, he pitied Lulla. He let her out of the roots, Lulla stood up and the mark on her arm stopped glowing. "What is that mark on your hand little girl?" the gnome asked. "I'm not sure. It glows when I'm angry or sad, but I don't know why. I think it's the same birthmark as my mom used to have..." Lulla replied. Unfortunately, she doesn't know anything else about it. The wizard pointed out that the mark resembles a dragon or at least has to do something with it.

Lulla was a bit confused about what was the meaning of the mark. After a moment of silence, they began to walk back. As they made their way through the bushes, fireflies were guiding them. Small critters were running through the bushes, chirping, buzzing, croaking and all kinds of sounds were coming from all corners of the dark forest. As Lulla walked, her leather boots were making thudding sounds as she stepped on the ground. At one point there was an orange flower in their way. Lulla didn't want to step on it, so she planned to step around it. But the gnome wizard grabbed her hand. He told her to carefully step over it because this flower's pollen can cause hallucinations, it is called Aurora Hazebloom. Aurora references colorful lights in the sky (these can only be seen in Frostholm) and Hazebloom references the hallucinations the "plant" causes. So she slowly stepped over it, The gnome wizard just took a long way around, not risking disturbing the flower. At last, they reached the spot where Lulla and Blade settled down for the night. Lulla was leading the way and so she squeezed through the bush with the twisted dagger still in her hand.

Lulla emerges from the bush and Blade is standing there, just staring at her, stunned. She stuck her head into the bush and the gnome that was following her close behind was gone. They were both confused and told each other what happened. They were confused, to say the least. Blade realized something was up, and he told to pick up the leather bag while he untied the horse. They prepared to leave and continued on their way through the forest. Despite the nighttime, the forest remained well-lit; the glowing plants cast a soft illumination throughout the woods. But walking through was unnerving for Blade and Lulla, they had bounty hunters on their tails at the end of the day. It was quiet for the most part but one time they heard a repeating gloopy sound. They stopped dead in their tracks and just listened. Lulla noticed something coming from the right in front of them and alerted Blade. They looked at the creature slowly coming. It was a giant white slug with glowing lines on its sides and pink feelers, resembling smaller antlers in a way. This creature was called Luminis Veilhorn, “Luminis” meaning light and “Veilhorn” meaning magical (or something with magical aura) horn. They watched the slug crawl across from one side to the other.

Lulla was amazed by the sight of this creature. She had never seen anything like it and asked him about it. As they walked Blade told her about magical creatures that inhabit different places all over Valeria and some a few places in Forsthalm. Out of all of the animals Blade talked about, Lulla was most interested in the ones from Frosthalm, like war-hogs or war-bears, both of which were used by the Ice Elves in wars. War-hogs are big and muscular boars with thick white fur and large tusks. They are essential when it comes to war campaigns in the north. The other ones, war-bears are used mainly for transport in harsh, cold environments but can be equally effective in combat. Nowadays they are rare in the wild, most of them are bred in captivity for the purposes listed above. Lulla asked if she would be able to ride a war-hog. Blade hesitated for a moment, but then he answered. Maybe someday, but he can't promise anything.

At the brink of dawn, the two came across the ruins of a smaller house on a clearing somewhere in the middle of the Southern Ravine Forest. It was a little strange that somebody would build a house in such a remote place like this. Whoever used to live here knew how to take care of themselves. They approached the ruined building, beside the stone walls, the house was in ruins. Blade got down from the horse and tied it to a post that was just outside the home. Lulla followed Blade as usual and they approached the wooden doors, it was locked. He took a second look at the house, just to check if it was really abandoned as they thought. There was no sign of anyone living here for maybe years. The roof collapsed in one part and there were signs of vegetation beginning to grow on the walls. Blade walked up to the door again and took a step back. Then he charged at the door and kicked it, but instead of the door bursting open, his leg went right through, due to the door's condition. While Blade was trying to pull his leg out of the hole in the door, he quickly glanced at Lulla, who was thoroughly amused by the action.

Finally, he got his leg out. After that he reached through the hole, looking for a key in the keyhole, but there was none to be found. He began to get frustrated with the door so he kicked the lock, breaking it. At last, they entered the ruined house. They began to look for loot since the door was locked, there was a high chance there would be something worthwhile. The whole first floor consisted of the living room and kitchen in one and the washroom (a toilet where you can also wash). There was also a staircase that led to the second floor. Blade made his way to the kitchen portion of the house and began looking. He was looking for a while but then. He had hit the jackpot. He found the Shadestone Pastry. Shadowstone Pastry is a pastry that originated in Shadowmire as a food for sailors. It is made out of wheat, salt, water, and other optional spices. Shadowstone Pastry doesn't spoil, and although it doesn't really taste like anything, it is useful when you don't have easy access to food. Blade was really glad about this found. This could hold out until the end of their journey, so they didn't need to worry about food. But when he opened one of the cupboards he found a jar of unknown jam. He tasted it and found out it was a wildberry jam (wildberries are basically all kinds of berries that can be found in the forests). The jam's tanginess mellowed into a gentle sweetness. It was indeed delicious.

In combination with the Shadestone Pastry, emerged a truly magical snack. Meanwhile, Lulla wandered to the second story of the house. When Blade was done enjoying his found, he walked over to the living area. A fireplace stood there with different decorations on top of it. One of them was a pencil drawing, a portrait of a family of three. Father, mother, and a very little girl, their daughter. As Blade was looking at the drawing, a scream came from the second story, Lulla's scream. He rushed up the stairs, and there he saw Lulla standing in the hallway, looking into one of the rooms. He ran over to her and looked inside the room.

There, right by the bed lay a person, no, a chimera. A humanoid chimera was leaning onto the wall. It had three arms, a weirdly shifted face, and its torn clothes were revealing a small head with long dark hair growing out of its stomach. It was semi-conscious, probably starving as chimeras only consume flesh. Blade was projecting the photo he saw seconds ago in his mind. It was the whole family, someone had used the Beastbane and consumed everyone else. He took Lulla by the hand and took her downstairs. There he calmed her down and gave her the food he found since she must have been hungry, since last night's dish wasn't very rich. Blade again ascended back to the bedroom where the chimera lay. He slowly approached it and took a closer look. The chimera did take notice of him but it didn't try to consume him. Blade took pity on the creature, and so he took out his dagger and ended its suffering. The only other item that Blade took from the house was a doll, that he gave to Lulla. She appreciated it, even though she knew what happened to its former owner.

And so they left and continued on their journey... Their darkest hour was coming.

IN MY DARKEST HOUR

The smell of noble premises could be felt in the air. A lord with long grey hair and beard sat on the dark throne. A man rushed into the hall. “Lord Ironbane!” the man yelled, catching the attention of the bored old man. “They have found her! They have found the daughter of The Dragonslayer!” the man continued yelling. The lord’s eyes lightened, and he stood up from his throne. “GET OVER HERE, TELL ME EVERYTHING YOU KNOW!” the old man yelled in his hoarse voice. The servant ran closer and began to tell him everything he knew about the situation. “We received a message from General Draven Silverwing. A few days ago he was situated in the city of New Eastbourne on the territory borders.” The servant continued retelling the message. “GET TO THE POINT!” the old man insisted. “Okay so then one day, he was at the bounty-hunting pub and some mercenary walked in and there was a goblin girl following him, he assumed she was his slave but then he noticed she bore the Dragonslayer mark-” “AND THE WHAT” the lord cut him off. “Well they left a few moments later, but he picked up a bounty hunt so he should come back. “Also, Draven was alone and wasn’t equipped so he decided to not engage. Meanwhile, he put up a bounty on them. The mercenary was wanted dead or alive and the girl was wanted alive. Those bounties were also huge so they attracted a lot of attention. And the next day, he came back with the girl and so they engaged him, but he ran away. And as if right now, they should be pursuing them. That’s all we know now.” he finally finished. The lord was beyond excited, Draven was his best soldier, and he would surely bring him the girl back. Finally after all those years. We will once again have the blood of Dragonslayer at our disposal. Maybe, just maybe, I’ll have enough to begin the ascension, if not we can at least enchant our weapons to gain The Wyrmforged Arms.

The Wyrmforged Arms are legendary weapons that are created through the ritual of enchanting normal weapons with the blood of Dragonslayers. Individuals that have slain a dragon. The blood as well as the mark can be passed down through generations. Today there are just a few individuals that still have this mark. The last individual who slain a dragon was Talia, the goblin.

Eleven years ago, there lived a goblin in the town of Silvershadow Haven, in the territory of Valeria Aeloria (Northeast of the Ironhold Citadel, in the Valeria Serrafel). It was a peaceful beastmen town but tension was in the air, the town lies at the territory borders. In this town was a goblin woman named Talia. She had long pink hair tied in a bun, a squishy face and she stood at around 1.3 meters. Talia was young and ambitious, always jumping headfirst into any adventure she came across. The beastmen were accepting of her and she was well-liked by the townsfolk. From time to time some people wandered in, intending to abduct her. But her compound in the middle of the town was secure and she even hired two large wolf mercenaries to guard her compound. She owned a variety of weapons and gadgets she got from her adventures but there was one more goal she wanted to accomplish. Slaying a dragon... She has never told anyone this, because she knew that she would get laughed at. Even though she was liked by everyone in the town, she never had any close friends.

The journey that she was preparing her whole life for had come. The night before her departure, she was packing up her gear. She wondered what weapons should she pack. There was the zweihänder, a great sword but it was as tall as her, and even though she could lift it up, slaying a dragon with it would be probably impossible for her, The same goes for her claymore, which she got from ice elves. Then there was the forest elven dagger, which acted as a shortsword for her, good but not quite it. Next up, there was the Sandoran human saber, It was still pretty long but it seemed as if this was the best choice.

“Okay, so next, I’ll need a secondary weapon!” she exclaimed happily. She indeed was excited about this journey. She walked over to one of the large chests that were scattered all over her compound and opened it. Inside was a clump of gadgets and weapons. She was pulling them out of the chest and inspecting them, one by one. Eventually, she picked an arm cannon. It had three steel barrels that could be loaded with a magazine and gunpowder. You could attach it to your forearm with a series of belts. The cannon could be fired with the handle that could be grabbed with a hand on the arm where the cannon was and pushed down, setting off a spark, and in combination with the gunpowder, it would shoot three steel bullets (about three centimeters in diameter) or alternatively, a sack of pellets that would be torn upon the gunpowder exploding and the steel pellets would be launched, having a more extensive spread but the impact is less damaging.

She straps it around her forearm and grabs some steel bullets from the shelf above. Then she walks over to the barrel of gunpowder and scoops up some into a pouch. After she picks out a bunch of other weapons, gadgets, and supplies, she moves on to picking armor and clothes she'll wear.

A few weeks earlier a rumor of a dragon nesting at the edge of Frosthalm Mountain Wall. This mountain wall is the only way to access Frosthalm from Valeria (by land). The mountains are incredibly hostile and crossing them is impossible just by yourself. But reaching just the edge should be that hard. Lastly, Talia was collecting testimonies from townsfolk, disguising it as just "Dragon research" but in reality, she wanted to prematurely find out what kind of dragon was she going to face off against. Most testimonies mentioned that it was "Drake" or in other words, a young dragon.

It took a while, but eventually, Talia chose her clothing, consisting of a thick coat and thick pants. Besides that, she equipped a reinforced warm gloves and boots. She also strapped herself with all kinds of armor, including a forehead guard and goggles, in case of encountering a blizzard. At the brink of dawn, Talia walked down to the stables and prepared her pony 'Izzy'. She equipped her with a lot of armor, four leather pouches filled to the brim with supplies, and a cart loaded behind the horse... For her trophy. Talia walks out of her compound on the pony. Her two guards are standing outside as usual. She walks up to one of them "Hey Ulric, I'm going out for a few days!" she says with a smile on her face. "Few days huh?" Ulric looks at the amount of supplies Talias carrying. "Yeeeah, so you know? If I don't come back within two weeks. You'll know you've been dismissed..." Talia's smile vanishes. Ulric nods and goes back to thinking. "Goodbye, Lycan!" telling the other guard with the same smile as before. Lycan turned his look toward her and nodded his head in response. And so Talia leaves the town, heading north...

“It should be less than a kilometer to the great ravine, it must be!” Blade yelled out. Lulla was digging her little fingers into Blade’s stomach as she was holding onto him. They were rapidly approaching The Great Ravine, but the enemy was close behind. Five armored men were close behind them, one of them being General Silverwing. He was nothing short of a beast. During the chase, a loud bang was heard two times, it was most probably a cannon of some kind because as Blade rode his horse he could sense something flying right by him shortly after each bang. “STOP! YOU IDIOT, YOU’LL HIT HER!” could be heard from behind them. They ran and ran, and the enemy seemed closer and closer. Suddenly a massive hole emerged in front of them, it was The Great Ravine. Balde almost didn’t slow the horse down quick enough. The horse stopped at the very edge. Blade looked from side to side, there was a rope bridge leading across the ravine. He and Lulla charged toward the bridge, it was long, very very long. The bounty hunter stopped right before the bridge except one. He ran after the two. After a solid minute, they reached the other end, Blade saw the lonely bounty hunter still running after them, Blade casted Sphere of Flames and placed his hand onto the bridge’s railing, setting it on fire. When the lonely bounty hunter realized what was going on, the bridge collapsed and he fell all the way down. “Well...” Blade sighed heavily. “This should give us some time before they get to the next bridge...” Blade told little Lulla. “Hold on, the other ones are not moving.” Blade said, confused. He could see their silhouettes. “Wait... are these guys... from Serrafel?! What are they doing here? Deep within the Valeria Aeloria.” Blade continued staring at them, trying to make out anything noteworthy about them. “We have to move, quickly!” Blade exclaimed.

“FINN!” one of the soldiers yelled out as he watched his brother-in-arm plummet into the ravine. He began to tear up and curse Blade for what he had done to him. Draven walked up to him. “GET YOURSELF TOGETHER! The bounty hunt he was on before we began chasing him was no joke. We cannot underestimate him anymore.” Draven said. He began to walk west, going toward the next rope bridge, a few kilometers away. “They might be in the lead for now, but they still have huge bounties, if we won’t catch them, somebody else will...” Draven said quietly.

Saharistriders are bipedal lizards from Sandora, They can be mounted and even though they can't carry much weight besides the person itself, they are incredibly fast, perfect for sending messages. Draven's letter to Lord Ironbane and bounties were spread by delivery men using Sahrstriders.

Blade and Lulla have reached the Northern Ravine Forest. It was the third day of their pursuit. The soldiers found them while they were resting during the last night by sheer accident. One of them was smoking opium and was out of his mind. They were passing by Blade's and Lulla's resting spot, not knowing about them. The opium-smoking soldier was told to stop but he didn't listen, even though Draven roared at him for a solid few minutes. It is a mystery how he remained so patient. Suddenly the soldier accidentally fired his arm cannon in Blade's direction. Blade jumped up as soon as the three bullets landed right by him. Lulla did as well, "What was that!?" Lulla squeaked. "Fuck! They have found us!" Blade said. He grabbed Lulla by her hand and threw her up on the horse. They bolted out of there. Draven and his soldiers obviously noticed them and ran after them. The forest made them harder to catch but the chase lasted hours.

Blade gazed at the bounty hunters, or soldiers on the other side. "Okay, we should get going." Blade whispered to Lulla. "Okeh" Lulla mumbeld. Blade turned around on the horse and they dived into the next forest. "What are these guys doing here?" Blade was talking to himself. Lulla remained silent. This forest was very similar to its southern counterpart, although there were some alternatives. These forests used to be one before the ravine was created thousands of years ago. But one thing that was the same was the orange flower from two nights ago. A bunch of these flowers stood in their way while they were traversing the woods. "Walk around them..." Lulla whispered to Blade. "What? Why?" Blade replied. "A gnome wizard told me they cause hallucinations..." she said softly. Blade had put the pieces together. He breathed in and sighed heavily. They took a longer path around them, making sure there was no contact. This night was probably the last when they could get a real rest before charging toward the Elven Kingdom of High Trees.

In the evening they approached the edge of the forest. The northern forest is smaller than the southern one. As they got to the edge, they saw a bunch of groups of lights and heard some kind of rambling on the great plain. "Shit... Those might be Blood Elves, we should wait until the sunlight." Blade said. Together they found a good spot to stay in, it was nicely covered by dense bushes. They sat down and had a snack, consisting of the Shadowstone pastry and the wildberry jam. Lulla was in love with it, and she ate a whole bunch of it. Blade was meanwhile sitting by and thinking. "Hey Lulla, bring that bag over here." he said. Lulla stopped eating, placed it on top of the brick of pastry, stood up, and brought the bag to him. Blade thanked her and she returned to munching on the treat. Blade pulled out the can of snus, picked up a fresh pouch, and placed it under his lip. He relaxed while lying on the ground. Any thoughts he had on his mind were gone. He drank a bit of water they had and just lay there. "Hey, Blade... those guys... are after me." Lulla said quietly. "Huh?" Blade replied. "It has to do something with my past..." Lulla said while looking at her snack. "Look. It doesn't matter right now. I'll make sure to get you to safety." Blade said confidently. Lulla remained silent.

After about half an hour, he stood up. "Okay let's get some rest, I'll stay on guard for the night. So we won't get ambushed this time." Blade said quietly. Lulla nodded and toppled over on the grass. The night was rather quiet, some critters could be seen throughout the night but no danger. Blade took short naps during the night but stayed aware. In the morning as they were packing up, Blade heard chatter and armor clanking in the distance. "Augh shit! They are coming! Move! Quick!" Blade said in a shaky voice. He grabbed Lulla and the leather bag and threw them on the horse. He got on the horse himself and they bolted out of the forest. A vast plain was the only thing between them and the Elven Kingdom. In the far distance, he could see the high trees that made up the kingdom. "We're close, we can make it!" Blade thought to himself. Dirt was flying out of the ground under the horse's stomps. After a bunch of kilometers, Blade became calm, their destination was closer than ever. Suddenly an arrow scraped the horse's armor. The soldiers had caught up to them. "Shit! How did they catch up to us so fast?!" Blade was shaking. Blade squeezed his legs against the horse's sides, signaling to go faster. As they ran a different arrow came flying. This one pierced one of the soldier's neck. Draven looked over to the side, on the small hill, in the grass was a blood elf with a crossbow. Draven looked pissed off. "You two! Go take care of that little shit! We'll go after them!" he yelled.

The two soldiers went after the blood elf for revenge. We don't know what happened to the elf, but we can say for sure he didn't make it out. Draven and the other soldier were catching up with Blade and Lulla. "Finally, after all these years..." Draven thought to himself.

"It's only two or fewer kilometers, but they are right behind us... We can't make it..." Blade was on the verge of tears. He never got so emotional in years. "I've failed you, little one." Blade whimpered. "Blade look!" Lulla squeaked and pointed in front of them. It was an elven scout on a horse, taking a look at the situation. They ran toward him, The scout drew his bow, but he pointed it away from them when they got closer. "Blade?!" the scout yelled in surprise. Blade knew the scout, and they ran up to him. Blade summarised their situation and begged the scout to take Lulla, and get her to the kingdom... "Wait, what about you?" the scout asked. "I have to hold them off, they will catch up to you." Blade yelled. Blade handed over Lulla to the scout, she resisted but was overpowered. "You'll be okay, don't worry..." he said to her. "Gavin... tell her majesty, my last wish. To take care of her, teach her to fight! For all those years of wars in your name. In the name of my mother!" Blade roared at him. "I promise Blade... I promise." The scout replied. Then he charged toward the kingdom, Lulla with him. She cried, she cried so much. Blade turned around, pulled out his twisted dagger, and charged right against the soldier. Draven slowed down. "This guy... This hellspawn was delivering her to the elves. But then why is he willing to die for her? Is he not a mercenary? What now?" Draven was confused. The other two soldiers came back and passed him.

"COME ON! FIGHT ME!" Blade yelled maniacally. He got to the first soldier. With one clean cut, he cut off the soldier's arm. The soldier fell off the horse in shock. Blade stopped the horse and waited for the others to approach him. One down three more to go. The plains suddenly began to fall into a shadow. Today was the annual solar eclipse.

The two soldiers were charging at Blade with Draven further behind them. One had a bow and the other a sword. The one with the bow drew it, ready to shoot at Blade, so they could pass through. As the battlefield was covered in shadow, Blade raised his arm and casted Shadowwalk. He disappeared off of his horse's back. The soldiers were surprised. "What!?! Where is he!" one of the soldiers yelled. His horse remained standing in the same spot. They intended to slay the horse so they could continue to pursue Lulla. The archer drew his bow once again, intending to shoot and injure Blade's horse. Suddenly Blade appeared above the archer as he was riding his horse. As he fell, he spun with his dagger in his hand. The spinning motion gave his strike such a power and speed, that he decapitated the archer. His head dropped onto the ground. The horse didn't stop. Blade managed to stay on the horse, he kicked the archer's dead body off and took control of the horse. He got closer to the other soldier, who prepared to strike Blade. But he stood up on the horse and jumped toward the soldier, ready to strike him down.

But something was off... Blade felt a great pressure in his chest. The time has slowed down. Blade slowly looked upon his chest. He could see his breastplate slowly collapse under the sword strike. The blade had pierced the armor. He fell down from the horse and rolled for a bunch of meters. The soldier stopped his horse. "Draven! Go ahead, I'll finish off this bastard!" he shouted as he began to approach Blade, who was lying on the ground, bleeding. He probably broke a bunch of his ribs when he landed. Draven passed by them, heading for the elven kingdom. Blade was holding his chest from the pain, and the soldier approached him. The soldier mocked Blade for minutes, beating him even more while he was on the ground, barely conscious. The plains were once again covered in sunlight since the eclipse ended. Sun was reflecting off of the soldier's sword when he raised the sword above his head. "Die scum! Die by my hand!" the soldier exclaimed. Blade came to his senses and tried to dodge the strike. And so he thought he did until he noticed that the soldier had cut off his left arm. The rage and adrenaline he felt at that moment made him spring up from the ground. He threw himself onto the soldier, casted a Sphere of Flames on his palm, and pushed it against the soldier's face.

The soldier fought back but Blade didn't let go. Blade pulled his hand away. Melted skin was dripping from his gauntlet. After that, he pushed the fiery ball against his wound, sealing it. The pain was immeasurable; he let out a morbid scream, and he passed out from it. But he woke up just moments later. He stood up and slowly walked over and grabbed his dagger, which was lying a few meters behind. Blade picked it up and limped over to the soldier, whose eyeball was on the verge of falling out due to the burn damage his face sustained. Blade sat on top of him and stabbed his forehead with the dagger, piercing his brain. Blade fell over to the ground, just looking at the sky, exhausted. He felt a warm breeze on his whole body. There he lay for a few minutes. "Oh my god! It's the wanted guy! The one from the bounty!" a young man's voice could be heard nearby. Three young men walked up to Blade. A few of his broken ribs pierced one of his lungs, every breath he took only caused more pain. One of the guys had a mace, he raised it and smashed Blade's face with it, even breaking his mask. "Idiot! If they can't recognize him, we won't get the bounty money!" the other guy lectured him. They bickered for a few moments and then the guy went for another hit, this time to the chest. Then he hit him again, blood sprayed all over the place, and was spilling all over the ground. "Let's move before someone sees us." the third guy says. They picked up his body and went to claim their bounty. Draven returned after an hour. Blade was nowhere to be found, only the bodies of his comrades. Draven was livid, not only did the scout escape with their target, but Blade was gone as well. It was only a couple of days later when he found out that his bounty was claimed. He was resting in the town of Aboran, behind the border, in Valeria Serrafel, when he got a message that his bounty was claimed. The next day, Draven sends a message by Saharistrider delivery men to Lord Ealdrich Ironbane II, about the situation and announces that he is on his way back to Ironhold Citadel. "A military interference is necessary to retrieve the dragonslayer from the elves." Draven said to Lord Ironbane. "We can't start another conflict after our failure in the Invasion of Sandora. Also, there is that ascended mortal living there. Waldhexa..." Lord Ironbane said. "Then we have to wait until the dragonslayer comes out." Draven replied. "That is a viable option, no one besides the Serrafel elite should be aware of the Wyrmforged Arms." Lord Ironbane agreed. "Then it's settled." Draven said and left the throne hall.

When Blade lay there that day, he thought of having eternal life, so he could be there for Lulla, everlong...

Chapter 6

LIFE ETERNAL

Nothing could be smelled in the dark void. The void didn't let any light come through. Blade opened his eyes. But the darkness caused him to not realize he actually had opened them. What was this place, he wondered. His mask was split in the middle but was still holding onto his face. After a couple of minutes, he noticed that he wasn't standing or lying on the ground, he was floating. He tried to stabilize himself somehow but he didn't even know which way was up. Suddenly he noticed something in the distance. An orange glow. He looked at it but was very confused and wondered what it could be. As he floated there, out of nowhere something illuminated him from down below. He wanted to look down but before he could, the source of the light bluish light rose in front of him. It was a glowing woman with an other-worldly appearance, her eyes were black and she had three pairs of feelers on her head. She had a long braid that resembled an animal tail in a way. Blade was speechless. "Welcome, mortal in the gateway to the realm of the dead..." she spoke in a strong, sonorous, feminine voice. "What?" Blade stuttered. "You have died my precious little half-elf..." she said as she reached her large finger and poked Blade. Her finger was larger than Blade himself. "But... I have an unfinished business in the realm of living!" He shouted with a serious expression. The giantess giggles. "We are aware of that, my dear. Your journey was rather interesting. At least according to The Guardian" she said. "The Guardian?! Wait, then who are you?" Blade said, surprised. "Oh, you dummy. I'm The Spirit, creator of all living." she said while giggling. He was absolutely stunned. "You know, with Guardian, we were watching your journey. We found it pretty amusing. We've been watching you since you've killed the primordial deity, Mortalis." Blade was still too stunned to speak. "Heh, I must say, I almost called Sagittarius in when you stood up to those guys." Sagittarius is a celestial. She's a cosmic archeress who is said to tear the skies and send out a celestial arrow with her bow on anyone who dares to threaten Nihiltania's existence. "You've been watching us?" Blade asked, amazed. "Yes, well I should get to the point. The Guardian was dissatisfied with how your journey ended, he said that you deserve a proper ending to your story. He also said he was impressed by you slaying Mortalis." the Spirit continued.

“What are you trying to say?” Blade asked her. “Well, The Guardian asked me to bring you back into the realm of living so you can finish your story. But even though I can create life, I cannot bring the dead back to life. Although I can raise you from the dead as a corpse. So now go, finish what you’ve started.” as she finished talking, the whole dark void was illuminated by a bright light, blinding Blade. He was floating no more.

The smell of rotten corpses filled Blade’s nose. He slowly opened his eyes and realized where he was, he was lying in a dark flesh pit filled with corpses of all kinds. He began to gag and right after vomited beside himself. He was inhumanely pale. He only had his torn clothes on, no armor or even his mask. The wooden hatch in the ceiling suddenly opened, Blade could hear someone talking from up there, and then a corpse was thrown down and landed on the pile. “What now? Can I even walk?” Blade thought to himself. Some began to crawl from the in between the corpses to Blade. He just observed the thing. The thing crawled up from the pile, no it was in front of Blade, who was just lying on the floor. It was a human, maybe, he wasn’t sure. The thing was starved, skin and bones. Its head was weirdly large, and its eyes were about to fall out of its own skull. It was missing legs, maybe even the whole lower body. Something was in it’s hands, a V-shaped dagger and a vial with liquid. Blade was disturbed by the sight of it, but he just kept lying there, he couldn’t move. The thing crawled toward Blade’s legs. “H-H-Hello friend...” the thing said in a shaky, wailing voice. Blade didn’t respond, he was disgusted by the thing. He turned his look away from the thing, thinking about what is he going to do. He got lost in his thoughts and didn’t hear what the thing in front of him said next. “I-I-I got one more dose of my precious Beastbane... Take it, friend.” it said and stuck the knife in Blade’s calf. Blade noticed but the pain was mild. Then it began to pour the liquid down the blade. Blade’s eyes opened wide and he toppled toward the thing in order to stop it but he was late. Beastbane has reached the wound. After it did, Blade got on top of the thing, he was furious. He grabbed the knife from its hand and stabbed the thing in the neck. Then he bashed his face in with his fist. “W-WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO ME!” Blade cried out. When he got down from the lifeless body, he noticed a small sewer entrance in the wall. He hesitated for a moment, he was finally able to stand up but when he did, he immediately fell to the ground.

The effects of the Beastbane began to take effect. He was shaking and twitching on the ground. A foam was pouring out of his mouth. This went on for dozens of minutes, then he stopped moving. After a few hours, he woke up. He remembered what happened. He was breathing heavily. Then he was about to stand up when he noticed. He had his left arm back. "What... How is thi-" then he realized. The Beastbane. It must have grown back while he was unconscious. He probably absorbed flesh while he was out. And just like that, his arm was back. He stood up and walked over to the sewage entrance. He kicked the rusted bars and broke off enough of them so that he could slip in. Blade crawled through the sewage. The smell was indescribably foul. He saw light at the end. When he got there he fell on into a body of water. It was a stream of some kind. The water was dirty from the sewage. He looked around. It was a cloudy day but the sun was still shining, for now. He found himself just outside of some city. As Blade sat there in the stream, he noticed his reflection in the water. He was stunned at the sight of his face. It was deadly pale but even worse, his cheek was missing skin, it rotted away. This wasn't caused by the Beastbane, rather it was a sign of him not being alive anymore. The only option left was... That he had become an undead.

His whole world froze at that moment. "What now?" he was asking himself. Undead are unable to use magic as well. Cause of the Beastbane's effects, his end was imminent once again. It was cruel, being undead isn't safe in these lands either. You are considered a hostile and dangerous being, just like chimeras. Blade now being partially both, made him a target for anyone that he came across. He had become a monster, like the ones he used to slay. But he had to make the most of the time he had left, while his mind hadn't become corrupted. "I-I want to see Lulla... One last time. And say a real goodbye" he thought and began to stand up from the stream. He looked up to the sky, the sun was getting covered by the greyish clouds and slowly setting. He determined which direction was which but he still didn't know where he was. Blade headed south to the forests. He wandered through the night, he felt tired but for some reason, he could continue walking the whole night. During that, he didn't meet anyone. In the early morning, he was walking down a dirt road, outside of the forest. When he noticed someone was approaching him from afar in front of him. He quickly jumped into the bush by the road. He desperately needed gear so that he could protect himself from any danger he might come across.

He waited around for the person to come by. After a while, he peeked out of the bush. The person was a goblin girl, she had long pink hair similar to Lullas, and she was covered in armor with a pony on a leash. Blade was surprised, he rubbed his eyes and looked again. The goblin was gone. Instead, it was an old beastman merchant with a pony. He was an old, feral-type fox (feral-type beastmen have more animal and less humanoid features). He was small, and the pony was towering over him. Blade was even more surprised now and he hesitated. It was not right but he was desperate. He jumped out of the bush and began to shout at the old beastman to surrender and give him his goods. The old merchant was terrified, he wasn't expecting to encounter an undead in these lands. He quickly dropped his backpack which had weapons hanging from the sides of it. The old merchant began to run, but Blade ran after him, caught him by the collar, and asked. "Hey! What city is to the north of here?!" Blade shouted at him. "A-A-Aboran!" the old man was shaking but he answered Blade's question. After Blade got his answer he let the old man go. "Aboran... so The Elven kingdom should be to the east." Blade said to himself as he approached the pony and began to loot the goods. He found armor pieces similar to the ones he had before. Except these ones were made by different races other than the elves. He equipped a human Seraffian breastplate, gauntlets, hip plates, and armor-plated boots. Lastly, there was a dark blue elven cloak from Frostholm. Blade equipped the cloak. The cloak also had a cowl because it was meant to be used in harsh, cold environments. He could hide his scarred face once again. Lastly, he had to pick a weapon. One, in particular, caught his attention. It was a large claymore that was on the luggage that the pony was carrying. The Claymore's guard had an ice-elven design. It was almost as long as Blade himself. It wasn't really his weapon of choice but he might as well test it since this could be the last chance he gets.

He strapped the great sword on his back and began to head east. He couldn't use the pony since it couldn't support his weight, so he just let it go. Blade walked for hours, he didn't feel hunger or thirst, it was a strange feeling but he got used to it after some time. He managed to avoid anyone for another day, but he couldn't go on forever without encountering someone. To his misfortune, he would encounter The Legion.

“The Legion” or “The Elven Legion” is a para-military nomadic group mostly residing in Valeria but has branches in all of the continents. All of the members are pure Blood Elves. Their beliefs consist of cleansing Nihiltania of all races except pure elves. Most elven kingdoms have a neutral relationship with The Legion, but they usually don’t even let them in their towns. The Legion is highly hostile and is considered one of the biggest dangers in Nihiltania. Lastly, they are responsible for Sagittarius, The Cosmic Archeress appearing first time in two hundred years when they tried a ritual to ascend their leader Jarl Duskblade to cleanse Nihiltania. Just as Jarl was about to ascend, Sagittarius tore the night sky, her clothing was glowing in blue light. She drew her bow and aimed with a glowing visor on her eyes and evaporated him with her celestial arrow.

Blade was walking through one of the many Valerian forests when all of a sudden a bolt came flying from in between the trees right in his eye. Blade felt hardly any pain, but he decided to trick the assailant and so, he dropped to his knees and leaned back. A blood elf girl with a smaller crossbow began to approach Blade, followed by another two blood elves from afar. When the girl got up close, Blade grabbed the claymore’s grip and cut the girl in half, diagonally. Her blood splashed on Blade’s clothing and armor. He stood up, ready to kill ‘em all. Blade was approaching the other two and, with a swift flick of his claymore, cleared it of the blood. The other blood elves were startled by whatever was this thing they were facing. Blade pulls the bolt out of his eye and throws it on the ground. The blood elf with a sword lunges at Blade, who dashes against him, thrusting and piercing the elf’s stomach, then he pushes down on the grip and throws him over his head, behind him. As the elf lands, he breaks his neck against the dirt ground. “One more...” Blade says. The final blood elf, gripped by panic, reaches for a horn and urgently sounds the alarm to alert his comrades to the impending danger. Blade frowns, his eyes don’t glow anymore under his hood.

He steps up to the blood elf, and slashes his stomach open, which makes the elf fall but Blade catches him. By sticking his arm in the wound. The elf screams in agony, Blade begins absorbing the elf's flesh, and his eye heals from the bolt. But after a while, Blade notices a hand growing out of his thigh. He pushes the now-dead elf away and looks at the hand on his thigh. Blade raises the claymore and cuts off the redundant hand. He wants to seal the wound with the Sphere of Flames but then remembers that he can't use magic anymore. So he just rips the elf's clothes and wraps his leg with it. He is about to leave when suddenly a rumbling sound begins to approach him. He takes a battle stance.

Now, seeing Lulla one more time is all he desires... Nothing else matters...

NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

The smell of fresh, crisp air filled Talia's nostrils as she inhaled deeply. She was roaming the Frostholm Mountain Wall for a week or two now. It has been around two days since she found the last trace of the drake. Traveling with the pony and the cart was hard enough. She was getting desperate but finally, she came across a cavern toward one of the peaks. Talia tied the horse to one of the frozen trees in a small valley beside the mountain peak and she ventured to the cavern at the top. At a few points, she had to use an ice pick and ropes to climb and it took many hours, but eventually, she got to the cave's entrance. She entered. In the cave, she lit a torch and ventured deeper into the mountain. It didn't take long before she reached a vast hall adorned with displays of bonfire torches that bathed the surroundings in a warm, rich illumination. She put down the torch and continued walking before she noticed something on the ground in front of her. It was the drake, he was sleeping but woke up in Talia's presence. His fiery eyes gazed upon her. He rose up from the ground, he was towering over her. While he stood on his hind legs he was about six times taller than her. Talia was dumbfounded by the beast's size. She pulled out her Sandoran saber that she had strapped to her back. The beast unleashed his first attack. He breathed a melting fire toward her. Talia anticipated the attack and sprinted towards the drake's leg, attempting to strike it with her saber.

However, the saber failed to penetrate the scales. "Shit, I might have underestimated this creature! Well, if slashing him won't work then I'll have to blow up his head or spine." Talia thought to herself. The drake charged at her, mouth wide open. But Talia pointed her arm cannon at his mouth and fired the one charge at the beast's face. The cannon shot was so powerful that it knocked Talia backward, almost dislocating her shoulder. And being in a cave amplified the explosion so much, she went temporarily deaf. Her ears buzzed and she became a bit dizzy. When the smoke cleared, it revealed the drake's mutilated mouth. It was a frightening sight but Talia stood up and ran against it.

She grabbed onto his nose, but the drake almost bit off her legs as she was trying to hold onto him. Just as he was about to snap his jaw, she climbed onto his nose and ran across his head. She realized that blowing off his head might not be possible or too hard, so she went to her spine where his wings connected to his back. She pulled out her ice pick and stuck it between his scales. Then she pointed her arm cannon at the center of his spine and fired while still holding onto the ice pick. The drake started to flail around, twitch, and jump around the cave. Smashing his tail against the walls. Talia held onto the ice pick with both of her arms but the dragon began to force himself out of the cavern, so Talia had to be quick. She pulled out a smaller bomb from her belt and stuck it inside the flesh wound in the spine that the cannon created. The drake roared in pain and continued traversing through the cave. It was dark, but the drake breathed fire in the moments of agony, creating small windows of time when she could see. Talia pulled out an oil lighter and lit up the bomb in the drake's spine, then she pulled the pick out and slid down the drake's back and tail until she landed on the floor. She plugged her ears and waited for a moment. Then "BOOM!" an explosion shook the whole cavern. Talia felt the shock wave travel through her body. A second much smaller impact could be felt a moment later. It was probably the drake collapsing to the ground. Talia pulled out a spare torch and lit it up, she began to stroll toward the exit.

After a minute of walking, she reached the drake. It was now lying on the floor, but he wasn't dead yet. He was still twitching on the ground with a huge hole in his back. Talia approached the beast. She intended to sever his head from his neck. So she walked up to his neck and blasted the scales off with her arm cannon, firing the last shot in her magazine. Then she repeated the process of blowing it apart with small bombs. When the small bomb went off, it also ended the drake's rather short life, and when it did his soul rose up from his body.

It looked at Talia and charged at her, it appeared to “enter” her own body through her left arm. She was mortified when a brand began to burn into her forearm. It hurt like hell, she fell to her knees and screamed at the top of her lungs. She stayed there on the ground for a moment, tears running down her cheeks. But eventually, she stood up and looked upon the drake’s corpse. The corpse was now completely stripped of all scales, flesh, and organs and only the bones remained. The head with a small portion of the neck lay in front of her. She delicately wrapped it with rope and began to pull it out. When she reached the entrance, she found a spot where she could safely descend her trophy down to her pony. After that, she climbed down, placed her trophy on the cart, and embarked on the last section of her journey. Her journey back took over a week. She walked through mountainous paths, through valleys but she eventually reached to end of the Frostholm Mountain Wall. Talia thought how lucky she was to track down a drake. The thing is if she encountered a normal, adult dragon, she probably wouldn't stand a chance. If there was anyone else tracking it, they were too late.

When she got back to her home in Silvershadow Haven, her tale had spread throughout the lands. One of those who heard about her accomplishment was Lord Ealdrich Ironbane II, the "king" of Valeria Seraffel. Lord Ironbane possessed the knowledge of how to create the Wyrmforged Arms, the legendary weapons capable of summoning dragons or even reaching ascension. With them, he could conquer Sandora and even Valeria Aeloria. All he needed was the blood of the dragonslayer. In the next months, Seraffel’s highest commanders came up with a plan on how to not only acquire the dragonslayer but also the whole process of obtaining another dragonslayer through procreation. A few months after Talia brought home the news of her great accomplishment, it seemed like an ordinary night. Talia just got out of the bath and made her way right to her bed. Outside Ulric and Lycan were guarding her compound. Lycan was strolling around on the roof, while Ulric was smoking leaning against the wall on the corner of the compound. A bar a few buildings away was bustling with life. It was a full moon, and a slight breeze was blowing through the duo's furs.

At some point, the moon got covered with clouds. In the dead of the night, as Ulric stood there with his pipe on the corner, a man in dark clothes sneaked up to him and stabbed him in the neck from around the corner. He struggled but was unable to fight back. Lycan heard the sound of Ulric drowning in his own blood. He was confused, so he walked to the edge of the roof and looked down. He saw nothing, he died the same way as Ulrich. His white fur became pink as it mixed with his blood. After that, he was dropped from the roof and landed head-first on the ground below. When the guards were taken care of, the assailants entered the compound, tied up, and kidnapped Talia. She was taken through the borders to The Dark Spire just behind the territory border. She was held there until they brought a goblin they captured for the procreation. Lord Ironbane has visited her on several occasions. He decided to wait until the Dragonslayer child aged, before extracting Talia's blood. It took another seven years. Talia was slowly losing her sanity in solitary confinement, the only thing keeping her together was her child whom she decided to name Lulla...

The day has come. Lord Ironbane ordered for Talia and Lulla to be brought to Ironhold Citadel for Talia's blood extraction. A convoy was transporting them during the night. Talia and Lulla sat side by side, tied up with two other guards watching them in one of the carriages. But everything hasn't gone as planned. The convoy was ambushed by The Legion, purely because of their spite for other races. They've found out that the Seraffel's military would be transporting a top-priority cargo. They blew up the carriages in the front and closed in on the convoy from sides, equally spread out along the whole convoy. They expected hordes of treasures, but they have found nothing of said value. That was because Talia and Lulla had escaped into the forests. They headed south and eventually settled in one of the forests where Talia had set up a hideout inside one of the larger trees. It was very dangerous for them to even be there since there weren't any places they could go. They could easily be captured by anyone they would come across. They lived there for over a year until one day, Talia went on a hunt but never returned, she had never told Lulla what their marks meant. Lulla waited for her for days but when she realized that her mother wasn't coming back, she went looking for her and was captured by a horde of goblins who took her further south where they held her.

We can only imagine what she had gone through while she was there, held deep within the cavern's walls. Until Blade came and met her, she didn't even know how it was to be free. But even when she got the taste of freedom, she was always pursued. Maybe now that she had reached The Elven Kingdom of High Trees, she could truly be free.

It was like a nightmare. Faces peeked from behind the trees at him. Pink faces, with white eyes and long hair. Blade wasn't scared though. He felt no fear. His hands stayed still as he held the claymore in front of him. From behind one of the trees, a hand holding a small crossbow pointed at Blade and shot at him. The bolt hit his shoulder piece, altering him. Blade looked the way the bolt came from. He saw just a slim, birch tree. So he charged at it and sliced it. The tree fell but there wasn't anyone behind it. Another bolt flew at him from behind and hit him in the back of the head, even piercing his skull. Blade jerked his head from the impact but didn't react otherwise. The flesh on his head pushed the bolt out. Blade slowly turned around. The faces were still watching him from behind the trees. Before he knew it a yelling blood elf was charging at him with a long sword. Blade quickly blocked the attack with his claymore. Then he swung the claymore horizontally at the elf, but he dodged it. "Hah! What even are you? What kind of monster are you?!" the elf laughed and mocked Blade. "Come on bitch! Feel The Legion's wrath!" the elf continued yelling at him. Blade stared at the elf with an angered expression on his face. While he held his claymore with his right hand, while he pulled down his cowl and then hood. The blood elf was kind of stunned when he saw who he was facing. The other blood elves that watched them also couldn't believe their eyes. "W-W-WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU?!" the blood elf shouted with his voice trembling. "I don't even know anymore... Human? Elf? Undead? Chimera? Maybe everything or maybe nothing. But that's not important to me right now. Now, I have to kill every single one of you." Blade said in a stoic voice, he swung his claymore, decapitating the elf's head.

The elf's corpse collapsed to the ground. Blade turned toward the other blood elves. One by one they began to step out from behind the trees. There were dozens of them. Maybe Blade was seeing double but there seemed to be a sea of them. He dropped to the ground right beside the elf's corpse. He looked at it with a blank stare on his face. As he looked at the body, he noticed something on its belt. It was a set of glass darts that could be loaded onto a crossbow, filled with a purple liquid. There were initials written on the glass "BB" also known as Beastbane.

Several years ago, The legion implemented a new weapon into their armory. A Beastbane darts. Beastbane darts were supposed to be loaded on any kind of crossbow (which were and are widely used by The Legion). They weren't meant to be deadly, but rather be used as "punishments" or simply "tools of torment" meaning that the blood elves would either sneak up to their victims or shoot them from hiding with the darts, infecting them with the Beastbane effects and addiction. Basically sentencing them to death.

The other blood elves were slowly approaching Blade, who lay there on the ground. "Shit... I have to do it..." Blade thought to himself before he grabbed the glass darts, opened his mouth wide open, and crashed the glass darts above his open mouth, even stuffing them further down his throat. The glass shards lacerated Blade's mouth throat and even stomach. Blood was pouring out of his mouth, all over him. The blood elves were absolutely shocked, some even vomited after what they saw. The Beastbane poured into the wounds inside his mouth and throat. Blade touched the corpse beside him, absorbing it in a matter of seconds. Then he rose from the ground, now taller and bigger, his shirt was torn by the arms that grew out of his sides. With his lower left arm, he grabbed the crossbow that was left behind on the ground beside the dart holster, with his lower right arm he grabbed the long sword. Just as a side note, a normal being would overdose and die, but Blade was already dead, he could only lose his mind now, but not before he had seen Lulla one last time.

Blade unleashed a carnage of boundless proportions. It was that day that the birch trees turned red. The Legion has never returned to the forest.

After Blade was done, he just continued on his way toward The Elven Kingdom of High Trees. A few days passed. Blade was now close, only a few kilometers away. He was walking through a forest when he stumbled upon a lake in the middle of it. As he was walking by, something caught his attention. Or rather someone, as there sat a young boy on a large rock beside the lake. The boy had blonde hair and blue eyes. In his soft hands, he held a glass water pipe (one used for smoking, not plumbing). He appeared to be smoking something and seemed rather relaxed. Blade walked up to him and got to talking to him. Unfortunately, the thing that the boy was smoking, was opium, so their conversation didn't really lead anywhere. Before Blade left, the boy offered him a puff from the pipe. Blade accepted but as he was breathing in the opium smoke, the boy fell down from the rock, into the water. Surprisingly, Blade didn't help him, after he took a puff from the pipe, he placed it on the grass below the rock and left. The only thing he felt then was the urge to complete his quest to say his final goodbyes.

He had to do it by any means necessary. So that Lulla would remember him everlong...

The Final Chapter

EVERLONG

The smell of war filled Lulla's nostrils as she was breathing heavily, lying on the mountain of corpses. She looked up to the sky and remembered the masked hero who salvaged her and gave her freedom in his sacrifice... It sucked that their goodbyes had to be so rushed. She always wanted to see him once more. Someone began to walk toward her. A silhouette of a man with long hair has entered her line of sight. He pointed a decorated sword toward her while another robed person approached and began to cast some kind of spell on the sword. Or was it on her? It didn't matter because when he casted the spell, blood in her body began to phase through her skin and into the sword's blade. Blade... Blade...

Lulla suddenly woke up in a cold sweat in one of the tree houses in The Elven Kingdom. "Lulla! Honey, are you okay?" an elf woman in a beautiful dress ran over to her. "I-It's nothing, your majesty. I just had a nightmare" Lulla said quietly while looking down. The woman was the Queen Isabella Rosesong. "Oh silly, I told you, you don't have to call me your majesty. Call me Izzy." Isabella said as she rubbed Lulla's hair. Lulla nodded and got out of the bed. Izzy and Lulla walked over to the balcony. Lulla sat down on one of the wooden chairs while Izzy brought her breakfast. You see Lulla had told Queen Isabella everything she had gone through and how the Seraffel was after her, probably cause of the "dragon brand" on her arm. Isabella pitied the poor thing and adopted her. She explained that Lulla couldn't inherit the throne but that she would be treated as a royal since she considered her kind of an adopted granddaughter of her long-lost friend. Blade's mother. As Izzy and Lulla were enjoying their breakfast on the balcony, someone busted into the tree house. "Your majesty!" a woman's voice could be her from the inside. Izzy entered the house, It was Waldhexa, The Ascended Elf Witch. She had recently returned from an expedition that lasted a few months. "Your majesty, we have a sit-" Waldhexa stopped mid-sentence when she saw Lulla come back inside from the balcony. "Your majesty, may we talk in privacy? It is a very serious matter." Waldhexa said with a serious expression. Her green hair waved as she was floating slightly above the ground. Izzy told Lulla to go play outside in the meantime. Lulla obliged and left the house.

“Your majesty... Blade is approaching the kingdom.” Waldhexa said. Izzy was, to say the least completely confused. “But, Blade... He’s dead.” Izzy said. “Well something at least resembling him is approaching the kingdom borders.” Waldhexa said with concern in her eyes. “W-What... do you mean?” Izzy asked with watery eyes. “My guess is that he didn’t actually die and somehow transformed into a chimera that is currently, approaching us.” Waldhexa told Izzy but she was too stunned to speak. Eventually, Waldhexa got permission to deal with the threat. Waldhexa floated out of the house and ordered the guards to not interfere while she took care of the thing...

She then made her way to the edge of the kingdom. Blade, now a monstrous centaurion chimera, stood there, just outside of the forest, his mind a chaotic storm of confusion and agony. He had lost so much of his humanity in the process. Before him, bathed in an ethereal green light, stood Waldhexa. “Blade...” she whispered, her voice filled with sorrow. “I cannot allow you to go any further. The darkness within you threatens all we hold dear.” Blade's eyes, once filled with determination, were now empty voids and his voice cracked as he spoke.

“Lulla... I must see Lulla. I want to see her! One last time.” Waldhexa's eyes glistened with unshed tears as she shook her head. “She wouldn’t even recognize you! Your appearance would terrify her! You have become a monster Blade!” In this tragic moment, Blade realized the depth of his transformation. “I DON’T CARE!” He shouted while he charged towards Waldhexa. He was so large now that he could be considered an ogre-class giant. “Shit!” Waldhexa summoned thorny vines from the ground. She rooted the giant chimera charging at her. When the thing collapsed it cracked the ground below. It completely stopped moving. “ha..haha...hahaHAHA” It began to laugh manically. Waldhexa just stood there, speechless. “It all makes sense now... Spirit just wanted to see me suffer. So it was for nothing...” It said with a deep weeping voice. “Blade... please leave... It’ll be for the best.” Waldhexa said and unrooted it. “Go... while yo-” Waldhexa couldn’t even finish her sentence when the chimera smashed her head against the ground and pounded it with its own arms. In the end, it once again fell to the ground. Waldhexa stood there bewildered.

In front of her own eyes, dark spirits appeared and pulled the corpse underground. “What... the fuck...” she said quietly. “Hihi, that was amusing. But I’m not satisfied with how this all ended. So I’ll stick around for the girl...” said a mysterious voice. Waldhexa was confused... “What happened here. The Spirit?” Waldhexa slowly floated over back to the forest. She retold Izzy what happened during the whole encounter. After she did, Izzy ran out of the house, looking for Lulla. She found her sitting on a bench in the park. She was looking at a picture book with war-hogs in it with another little elf girl. Izzy looked at her with tears in her eyes. She sat down beside her. Lulla looked at her with a curious look on her face. Izzy hugged her tightly.

“Everything will be okay, sweetie. Remember that... Blade will always be looking after you. He will always be by your side.”

Epilogue

SERAFFEL

Ten years later. “My lord. Abyss has accepted our offer concerning aiding our invasion of The Elven Kingdom of High Trees” said Draven as he kneeled in front of the throne. “Very well. Prepare the army. Our twenty-year-long wait is now about to end.” Lord Ironbane responded. “But we very recently got a tip that the Dragonslayer is not currently in the kingdom...” Draven said in return. “And we do not know where she could be.” The Lord stayed silent for a moment, thinking. “Hmm, still, put the army on standby. She’ll come back and if not, was her bounty enlarged?” Draven nods in agreement but then asks “Sir. Why haven’t we just found a dragon ourselves? Why bother hunting down this one?” Lord Ironbane thinks for one more second before answering “Dragons are basically non-existent anymore. Those that are left live in the most remote parts of Frostholm. It would take even longer to find one.” “And other dragonslayers?” Draven asked. “Talia was the only one who had slain a dragon in a hundred years. She won a lottery by even finding it.” Draven understood and then left the throne hall.

THE END